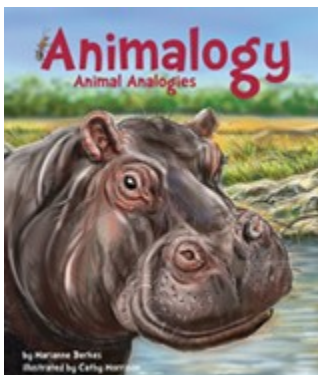




A Conversation with Marianne Berkes, author of *Animalogy* and *The Tree That Bear Climbed*

What drew you to writing, children's books especially?

As a child our home was filled books and music. I wrote plays that my friends and I performed in the summer in our back yard.— my Dad even helped us build some of the scenery. Reading, writing, music and theater have been a constant in my life. In high school I did interviews for the school paper, and in college wrote my first picture book for a Children's Lit class. But it was many years later, after I moved to Florida, that I said "I can do this!" Reading so many books to children at the library where I worked, I kept coming up with ideas of my own. Because I love kids and love "words," I started submitting my stories to publishers, and one day.....



What do you hope children get out of your stories?

An appreciation of our Earth and a respect for nature. I spent a lot of time out-doors as a child and still do. Discovering nature is a life-long adventure that I hope kids today still appreciate. Nature has so many stories to tell and is available to anybody, any place, any time. I hope kids will be entertained by my books, but also that they will want to learn more about the topic I've written about. My first book published in 2000 was about frogs making music in the night. Hopefully after reading this book, kids will go outside in the early evening, especially after a rain, and *listen* for the sounds I've written about. I've followed with stories about birds, shells, creatures living in an ocean reef, rainforest animals, animals that migrate, Arctic animals and Australian animals. I've also written a book about the planets that I hope kids enjoy. How can we ask them to save the earth, if they don't learn to appreciate it first? My books are in lyrical verse, making it easy and fun for kids to read, with lots of facts blended in. I want kids to really get *inside* my books, to read them more than once, each time finding something new and exciting!

What is your favorite animal?

Another difficult question, but as a pet, I would say "dogs." In the wild: "dolphins."

Of all the ecosystems you have written about, which one interests you the most?

That's difficult to answer, but I guess I'd say marine ecosystems.

What tips do you have to encourage young readers?

READ! READ! READ! Reading can take you to so many places, near and far. Also, open your eyes to the world around you. Ideas are everywhere! When you get an idea, write about it. It's a wonderful way to express what you feel or see. And if you don't know much about the topic you are writing about, do some research. It can be so much fun, kind of like a treasure hunt, because you never know what else you will discover. I do a lot of research for each book I write, using lots of reference books and on the Internet.



What is the most rewarding thing about having your books published?

That I get to read my books to kids in schools and libraries. I hope they will be inspired to keep reading and also write stories of their own. Actually, though, the kids *inspire me*, and often give me ideas for a book. I was reading ***Marsh Music***, which ends with a bird beginning the music of the day, when a student planted a seed! "I know what your next book is going to be!" he said with assurance. I wondered how he knew, because I was working on a book about seashells, but hadn't told anybody. The boy assumed it would be a book about birds. The next day I was out at the crack of dawn recording bird sounds and researching bird species. I wrote ***Marsh Morning*** as a companion book to ***Marsh Music*** and set ***Seashells by the Seashore*** aside for a while.

What other authors do you look up to?



There are so many that I have come to love over the years, having been a children's librarian. I'm a huge fan of author/illustrators like Eric Carle and Kevin Henkes whose touching stories with perfect illustrations can be read again and again. I'm envious that they write so beautifully and illustrate. Patricia Polacco is another one that comes to mind; she is a wonderful storyteller! Naturally I enjoy authors who write in rhyme like Jean Marzollo and Stephanie Calmenson, and repetition like Laura Numeroff, since that's what I like to do. Kids love rhythm, rhyme and repetition. It's like making music

with words. When you ask specifically which authors do a good job creating a learning environment, the three that come to mind first are April Pulley Sayre, Steve Jenkins and Anthony D. Fredericks. After I write this I'm sure I'll think of a lot more who write "creative non-fiction" including your Sylvan Dell authors, of course!

What's the best advice you have for parents to help their children learn to love reading?

Read about what interests them, and if they ask "read it again," don't hesitate to read the same book more than once. If a child has a favorite that will certainly help him/her love reading! I also think it's important for a parent to make it a point to read to their child at least 15 minutes a day!

Want to continue this conversation? Schedule an interview!

Contact Sylvan Dell's publicist, Heather Williams:
heatherwilliams@SylvanDellPublishing.com
(877) 958-2600